

Theatre Green Book

How does the Theatre Green Book relate to 'Net Zero'?

What is 'Net Zero'?

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change defines net zero emissions as 'the point at which global greenhouse gas emissions added to the atmosphere by anthropogenic (i.e. human-caused) activities are balanced by anthropogenic removals over a specified period.'

The easiest reading of this text is usually called 'carbon neutrality'. It means balancing our emissions with 'carbon offsets' – i.e. investing in 'carbon offsetting' schemes that absorb as much carbon as we emit. By spending money on it, we can (theoretically) achieve 'climate neutrality' without doing anything at all to reduce our own emissions.

There are two problems with this. First, off-setting schemes are controversial. It's hard to find schemes we can rely on, and there will never be enough to go round. So while some companies can 'get out of jail' in this way, it isn't a realistic solution to the climate crisis. Second, 'carbon neutral' usually refers only to our direct energy use (for example, in gas boilers and electricity – often known as 'scope 1 and 2'), and not to the emissions caused by the rest of our activities (for example, deliveries, audience transport, or the materials that go into our sets – often known as 'scope 3'). To solve the climate crisis, we each need to reduce our carbon emissions as much as we possibly can, across everything we do.

So a tighter definition of net zero – often known simply as 'net zero' – requires us to reduce our emissions as much as we possibly can BEFORE we resort to carbon offsetting, and to do so across the full range of our activities, including our supply chains.

Why can't we eliminate emissions completely? Because – unless we stop making theatre or touring altogether – we'll always need travel and deliveries, and the infrastructure doesn't yet exist to support that without emissions. We'll always need some new materials in our shows. And historic buildings are virtually impossible to upgrade to a state of perfect efficiency.

What is Theatre Green Book 'Advanced' standard?

Theatre Green Book Advanced Standard guides theatres to reducing their emissions as much as they possibly can.

It's a necessary step on the way to 'net zero'. Once theatres have reached Advanced, the next step to claim net zero is to offset their remaining emissions. We recommend theatres only do this once they've reached Advanced.

What does it mean to 'reduce emissions as much as possible'?

If we can't reach absolute zero carbon, the question is, 'How far should we go?'

'Science-based targets' help by determining how much everyone *needs* to cut emissions so as to limit climate change as a whole by a given date. For example, the UK Net Zero Carbon Buildings Standard will set targets for each sector of buildings in the UK, including for culture and entertainment. We'll use them to help set Theatre Green Book Advanced standard for UK theatre buildings.

However, the theatre sector is so varied in scale, in type of work, and in the age of its buildings, that it's difficult to define precise and equitable carbon targets for each individual company, and everything a theatre does. Besides, targets don't tell us what we actually need

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to do; or what's realistic and possible. And the climate crisis isn't only about carbon – it's about ecological collapse and resource depletion as well.

Theatre Green Book 'Advanced' provides the answer.

Using 'Advanced' standard to reach net zero

Theatre Green Book Advanced defines how far we should go to be as sustainable as possible. It is – we believe – the most realistic, comprehensive and accurate standard for theatres to plan for. It defines a shared standard for working sustainably. It incorporates science-based targets where possible. It requires us to do all we can in the areas of biodiversity and resources. It's the necessary precursor to 'net zero'.

Achieving Advanced will result in the biggest carbon savings each theatre can practically achieve. These will increase as national infrastructure becomes greener (for example, as the electricity grid and transport network decarbonise, so we can heat buildings, travel and tour with lower emissions). Advanced standard will keep being refined as we learn what's possible in practice, and as science-based targets are developed.

Here is a simple statement for use in net zero planning:

Theatre Green Book Advanced standard makes theatres environmentally sustainable by reducing carbon emissions to as low a level as practically possible, requiring minimal carbon offsetting to achieve net zero.

Carbon offsetting

We recommend that theatres only consider carbon offsetting once they have reached Advanced standard. Until then, they should put their energy and resources into reducing their own environmental impact.

Before offsetting, it's essential to check the credentials of any offsetting scheme. For example, schemes commonly involve tree planting. But reforestation doesn't itself reduce global demand for fossil fuels. And there's no guarantee a new forest will be permanent or well-managed, or that native species will be planted in the right areas.

So if you reach Advanced and decide to offset, make sure any carbon offsetting scheme is certified by 'The Gold Standard' (goldstandard.org). This is an independent, transparent, internationally recognised benchmark for 'high quality' carbon offset projects.

You can find more information about carbon and carbon offsetting here:

<https://www.wwf.org.uk/myfootprint/challenges/understanding-carbon-offsetting-and-your-footprint>